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The Effects of Sexism and Self-Concept on Body Satisfaction and Clothing Style Preferences for College Students

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Keywords: *Sexism, self-concept, body satisfaction, clothing, preferences*

Introduction: The purpose of this study is to examine how sexism and self-concept are related to body satisfaction and clothing style preferences. First, this study is designed to investigate the influence of self-concept (i.e., self-efficacy and public self-consciousness) on body image. Second, this study examines how sexism moderates the relationship between self-concept and body satisfaction. Third, this study investigates the effect of body satisfaction on clothing style preferences (i.e., fashionability, self-expression, self-confidence). A goal of this study is to develop and empirically test a conceptual framework for understanding college students' clothing selection with regards to their sexist attitudes and self-concept.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development: Self-concept theory demonstrates the one's self-image based on how we see us and how others see us (Solomon, 2007). This study adopted this self-concept theory to examine the effect of self-concept on one's body satisfaction and clothing style preferences. Self-concept is complex because it is related to the evaluations a person has about his/her own characteristics, and this study focuses on two important components of self-concept (i.e., self-efficacy, public self-consciousness) (Chang et al, 2014; Solomon, 2007). Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's confidence to accomplish certain goals (Bandura, 1977) while public self-consciousness is defined as an individual's self-attention in the public environment (Fromson, 2006). Body satisfaction is considered to be the positive inside feelings that people have about their body and often related to self-concept (Cash, 2004).

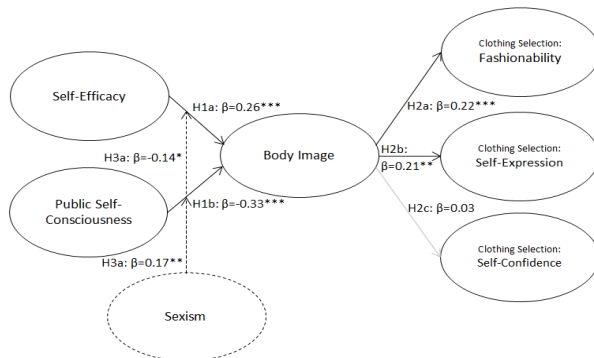
Clothing is a meaningful expression of self as a nonverbal communication tool (Damhorst et al., 2005). Thus, clothing can be used as an important means to express who we are psychologically and what we think about ourselves in our society. Clothing has long been studied related to self-concept (Damhorst et al., 2005). For example, dressing up, as a part of clothing style preferences, may lead to self-confidence. Body satisfaction is often associated with the clothing choice, such as revealing the body shape (Weisbuch et al., 2010). Sexism is defined as one's perceptions about roles based on different sex (Wagner & Berger, 1997). Sexism, sexist attitudes, has been conceptualized as a prejudice based on a person's gender-typically women. It reflects widely shared notion that men are superior to or more competent than women (Wagner & Berger, 1997). The level of sexism will be different by personal characteristics, and in turn, this may influence body satisfaction and clothing style preferences. Based on the self-concept theory and literature review, this study proposed three hypotheses:

H1: Self-concept a) self-efficacy; b) public self-consciousness will influence body satisfaction.

H2: Body satisfaction will influence clothing style preferences a) fashionability; b) self-expression; and c) self-confidence.

H3: Sexism will moderate the relationship between self-concept and body satisfaction a) self-efficacy and body satisfaction; b) public self-consciousness and body satisfaction.

Methodology and Results: This study utilized a quantitative survey method. The sample consisted of 205 college students in a large Southeast university. The scales used in this study adopted from previous literature (e.g., Kwon & Parham, 1994). The mean age of the respondents was 21.4 and most of participants were female (86.7%). With regard to ethnicity, the majority of them were Caucasian (69.8%) followed by Hispanic/Latino (18.8%). Each factor has a satisfactory factor loading, ranged from 0.78 to 0.93. The results of regression analyses showed the direct effects of self-efficacy and public self-consciousness on body satisfaction ($\beta=0.26$, $p<.001$; $\beta=-0.33$, $p<.001$). Thus, H1 was supported. Body satisfaction affected the clothing selection of fashionability and self-expression ($\beta=0.22$, $p<.001$; $\beta=0.21$, $p<.01$; $\beta=0.03$, $p>.05$).



Therefore, H2, predicting direct effects of body satisfaction on clothing style preferences, was partially supported. Last but not least, sexism negatively moderated the relationship between self-efficacy and body satisfaction ($\beta=-0.14$, $p<.05$), and positively moderated the relationship between public self-consciousness and body satisfaction ($\beta=0.17$, $p<.01$). Therefore, H3 was supported.

Conclusion and Implications: This study found that college students who believe their abilities to accomplish goals tend to have positive body image while people who care about what other people think about them tend to have negative body image. Therefore, it is important to develop the beliefs about their capabilities and less focus on concerns about others' opinions about them. Interestingly, people who are satisfied with their body image are more likely to choose fashionable clothing and clothing they can express who they are. On the other hand, they do not choose to make themselves confident and it may be because they are already confident about themselves. Sexism moderated the relationship between self-concept and body satisfaction. The levels of sexism influence the formation of healthy self-concept and body image. The results of this study might not be generalizable. Therefore, future study about different age groups and cultures is needed. Also, further research based on the gender difference needs to be considered.

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